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Albert Gore Jr.

Cold, Hard Facts on the Freeze

During the next two years, Congress, and the House in particular, is likely to be the scene of a major crisis in our nation's defense policy. Enormous federal deficits will demand major reductions in government spending. Those cuts are not all going to come out of social programs, and therefore many will come out of the military budget. And in the military budget, nothing is more visible and vulnerable than the nuclear weapons program: big-ticket items whose value to the national security has been sharply challenged by the nuclear freeze movement.

Among the nuclear weapons programs, the one with the least chance for survival is clearly the MX missile. But there are already indications that other programs, including the Pershing II missile for NATO and, very likely, the B1, again, will be challenged. Other programs, including cruise missiles and the Trident D5 submarine-launched missile, have their critics too, but are not as likely—for the time being, at least—to be at the center of controversy (although even this judgment may have to be modified, in the case of ground-launched cruise missiles for Europe).

We can expect President Reagan to show very little flexibility in this area. He will insist that the country requires all these weapons systems, and he will charge that if Congress refuses to fund them, it must take responsibility for weakening the national security, diminishing Soviet interest in arms control, and ultimately, increasing the hazard of war.

Proponents of the freeze reject this logic, and are likely to have enough votes in the next Congress to ensure that Reagan's arguments for major nuclear weapons programs across the board are rejected.

This having been done, however, members of Congress will then have to face the hard facts that (1) Reagan will not adopt the freeze program as his own, because to do so would require him to abjure everything he believes about dealing with the Soviets; (2) funding decisions for nuclear weapons programs will have to be taken by Congress without benefit of an arms control framework; (3) new or modified Soviet nuclear weapons systems will continue to appear and to move toward deployment; and (4) public opinion, which has been inspired to doubt the value of nuclear superiority, has never lost its repugnance for conceding it to the Soviet Union by unilateral actions.

What looms ahead for Congress, therefore, is a protracted struggle over the future of nuclear weapons, on a system-by-system basis, without benefit of any common framework for evaluating

each one and debating its merits in relation to an agreed national strategic plan.

The president's philosophy will not serve for this purpose, but neither will that of the freeze movement. On the day after the House passes a resolution affirming its desire for a mutual, bilateral freeze with the Soviet Union, it must nevertheless continue to decide the fate of U.S. nuclear weapons in the absence of such an agreement, or even of the hope for one while Reagan is in office.

Congressional advocates of a freeze will face an especially painful dilemma. A pattern of votes against nuclear weapons programs adds up to unrequited concessions to the Soviet Union. But a pattern of votes in favor of such weapons adds up to approval of a process that will rapidly erode the freeze as a viable policy for a future administration.

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What we lack today, and what the next Congress will urgently need, is a standard that will help us reach better-informed judgments as to what kind of nuclear posture we should have, as to what kinds of nuclear weapons programs are compatible with that posture, and as to how these decisions affect the stability of the nuclear balance and prospects for reaching an agreement with the Soviets.*

Two months ago, I joined with Reps. Les Aspin, Thomas Downey and Joel Pritchard to introduce a resolution suggesting what this standard ought to be.

The United States and the Soviet Union are heading toward a situation in which each will have the ability to menace a significant portion of the other's nuclear forces; specifically, the land-based ICBMs, which are the most accurate and in many ways the premier weapons systems.

Our response to the ICBM vulnerability problem has been the development of two new generations of ballistic missiles: the MX, for deployment on land, and the Trident II D5, for deployment at sea. Each will mark an increase in the number and accuracy of

U.S. ballistic missile warheads, such that either system, and certainly the two together, will constitute a threat to all Soviet ICBM silos.

The increasing vulnerability of U.S. land-based forces, and the coming vulnerability of Soviet land-based forces, are trends that are fraught with danger. Mutual fear of a first strike is highly destabilizing and markedly increases the risk of nuclear war, while putting at risk any prospect for meaningful arms control.

Congress should recognize this fear of a first strike as the central issue in judging whether existing deployments are adequate, for deciding what new deployments make sense, and for assessing whether arms control is on the right track. In the highly charged tension between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., even a hypothetical advantage gained by striking first is dangerous and destabilizing, because it generates fear and raises the specter of political intimidation. Our resolution states that, as part of the strategic arms reduction negotiations (START), the United States and the U.S.S.R.:

(1) Should place the highest priority on efforts to reduce and eliminate the fear by either nation of a nuclear first strike against it by the other.

(2) Should seek a verifiable agreement that produces stability in the strategic relationship between the two nations by ensuring that a nuclear first strike would not confer upon the attacking nation even a hypothetical advantage.

To grasp this framework and apply it, the president need not repudiate his view of the world, but rather, modify and refine it. In theory, the next Congress might seek to bind the president to freeze measures by threatening to block major spending bills until he gives in. I hope we will avoid that kind of confrontation, but to do so requires the development of a bipartisan consensus on the nuclear problem, rather than polarization of the debate. !

The freeze resolution, which I have supported, states an ideal we are not going to see realized, or even pursued, by the present administration. Meanwhile, Congress—and the country—will need some basis for a discriminating and, in the end, cathartic debate over our course of action. Given the right outcome, we might find areas of agreement strong enough to put consensus, rather than controversy, behind the president in his dealings with the Soviet Union.

The writer is a Democratic representative from Tennessee.

** Well, yes, really.
(and for R's 'new' START)*